

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter (B) – You are not the Same...**

Have you ever been told “you are not the same as you used to be?” What exactly does that mean? Is it a good thing or a bad thing? I guess it depends on the context. If I tell you, you used to be an addict, abusive and inconsiderate but you are not the same you used to be... it’s different than if I say you used to be kind, pleasant, caring but you are not the same you used to be... there is a difference, the way you perceive and receive the statements is different.

Within the statement you are not the same you used to be, there seems to be the implicit notion that we should always be the same, that we shouldn’t change... Yet our life is a **journey of change**, a journey of transformation, by definition a journey has change built into it... your starting point is usually not your end point, otherwise it is not a true journey. As long as we are on this earth, we will be changing... minute by minute our cells are changing, our appearances, our development, the way we think changes... We just can’t be the same we used to be, **even if we wanted to**.

**My daughter** is graduating HS this year and when she entered HS she had a project where she was creating a “vision board” that encompassed her favorite song, her future career goals, future school, goals and expectations. Interestingly enough she was given this vision board back this year as a senior and she was amazed at how much had changed, from her favorite song to her desired college... she noticed that in a way she was not the same that she used to be... **and that is okay**... we need to develop, we need to grow, we need to change...

**Imagine that you go into a store**, and you see a 2-year-old having a tantrum because he/she wants a toy and mom/dad does not want to buy it, you would not think much of it, you would likely understand and view it as a normal stage of a child’s development. Now imagine the next day you go to the same store and this time instead of a 2-year-old, you find Fr. Paul having a tantrum for the same reason (you might think being there done that), it might catch your attention because that is not what you expect at his stage of development... we need to change... you are not expected to be the same as you used to be...

**During** this Easter season we have been hearing St. Paul’s conversion story... and St. Paul in my opinion is one of those characters that probably heard “you

are not the same you used to be” frequently. As a young man he witnessed the stoning of St. Stephen, he persecuted and often arrested Christians, but he had an incredible conversion and from that point on he was not the same... I imagine his fellow soldiers approaching him and asking what happened? You are not the same as you used to be... you are not persecuting, you are not as zealous, you are not loyal to Rome. Even the 1<sup>st</sup> Christian community, who we heard in the readings trembled and were afraid just hearing the name Saul, were probably wondering and asking Paul... you are not the same you used to be... **what happened?** What happened was that Paul **had seen the Lord, the Lord had spoken to him, Paul had a conversion, he changed, he became part of a church**, he was guided by Barnabas into the body of Christ known as the Church, he was asked to **remain** with the Church.

You and I are not called to be the same that we used to be, **we are called to be what God has created us to be...** this journey, this pilgrimage called life is a journey of change, conversion and transformation... We are called to become what God wants us to be... He has a plan for us, he has a purpose for us and the only way that we can accomplish it, that we can be transformed into what he wants us to be is by **allowing him to be in us, transforming us**. In the first letter to the Corinthians St. Paul states eyes have not seen, nor Ears have heard what he has prepared for us, we have no idea **what he has made us for**, whatever we can think of, falls short of what he has planned for us. Therefore, the only way for us to become what he has made us for, is to allow him to be in us and for us to **remain in him**. He tells us that he is the vine, and we are the branches; if we remain in him and him in us we will yield much fruit. He tells us that the **Father prunes the branches that remain in him in order to bear even more fruit**, that **pruning is a process of change, is a process of conversion is a process of transformation**. A vine that is bearing much fruit, is not the same as it used to be, **because it has changed, it has been pruned**, it has borne fruit.

**How do I remain in him?** As the vine, our Lord gives us many ways to stay attached to him and for him to **remain in us**, he has given us a **church**, he has given us **sacraments**, he has given us **each other**, he has given us himself in the **Eucharist**. After his conversion, St. Paul remained in the church, he joined the disciples, he remained in Christ through the church in communion with his

body. As we approach the table of thanksgiving, the table of communion, let us ask our Lord to help us remain in him and him in us, that the next time we hear you are not the same that you used to be, we could truly say, **thank you Father, for pruning me to become what YOU created me for.**